

AMENDMENTS TO CLAIMS:

Claim 1 (Currently amended): A computer implemented process for auctioning services requested by a buyer via a network, comprising the steps of:

submitting by the buyer via the network a service request to a broker for auctioning;

specifying by the buyer via the network at the start of the auction the number N of best bids to be considered from the auction, where N is a number less than number of all bids, and predetermined by the buyer based on tradeoff between price competition among bidders (at a smaller N value) and number of bidders available for buyer selection of a bidder based on factors other than price (at a larger N value); wherein the bidders are sellers of services;

making by the broker the number N available to bidders via the network;

notifying via the network by the broker the buyer of the identities of the N lowest bids;

and

~~the buyer selecting by the buyer via the network~~ a bidder from one of the N lowest bids or choosing not to execute the service request.

Claim 2 (Original): A process as in claim 1, wherein the broker does not allow the buyer to consider any bids greater than the Nth bid.

Claim 3 (Original): A process as in claim 1, wherein the bidders can bid any amount as long as they beat an outstanding bid by more than a predetermined amount.

Claim 4 (Original): A process as in claim 1, wherein the service request is for print services.

Claim 5 (Original): A process as in claim 1, wherein the broker is an electronic broker operating at a node in an information exchange network.

Claim 6 (Original): A process as in claim 5, wherein the information exchange network is the Internet.

Claim 7 (Previously presented): A process as in claim 1, further comprising the step of making available by the broker to the bidders a buyer rating, wherein said rating includes information on the buyer's follow-through of bids in prior auctions.

Claim 8 (Currently amended): A computer implemented process for auctioning services requested by a buyer via a network, comprising the steps of:

submitting by the buyer via the network a service request to a broker for auctioning;

making available via the network by the broker to potential bidders a buyer rating, wherein said rating includes information on the buyer's follow-through of bids in prior auctions, wherein the potential bidders are sellers of services; and

considering by the potential bidders the rating in deciding on whether to bid on the service request, wherein the higher the rating, the more willing the potential bidders would want to bid, and the lower the rating, the less willing the potential bidders would want to bid.

Claim 9 (Original): A process as in claim 8, wherein the rating includes the number of service requests completed with respect to the number of service requests submitted in prior auctions.

Claim 10 (Original): A process as in claim 8, wherein the service request is for printing services.

Claim 11 (Original): A process as in claim 8, wherein the broker is an electronic broker operating at a node in an information exchange network.

Claim 12 (Original): A process as in claim 11, wherein the information exchange network is the Internet.

Claim 13 (Currently amended): An apparatus for auctioning services requested by a buyer, comprising:

means for the buyer to submit a service request to a broker for auctioning;

means for the buyer to specify at the start of the auction the number N of best bids to be considered from the auction, where N is a number less than number of all bids, and predetermined by the buyer based on tradeoff between price competition among bidders (at a smaller N value) and number of bidders available for buyer selection of a bidder based on factors other than price (at a larger N value), wherein the bidders are sellers of services;

means for the broker to make N available to bidders; and

means for the buyer to select a bidder from one of the N best bids.

Claim 14 (Previously presented): An apparatus as in claim 13, wherein the broker is configured such that it does not allow the buyer to consider any bids greater than the Nth bid.

Claim 15 (Previously presented): An apparatus as in claim 13, wherein the broker is configured such that the bidders can bid any amount as long as they beat an outstanding bid by more than a predetermined amount.

Claim 16 (Previously presented): An apparatus as in claim 13, wherein the service request is for print services.

Claim 17 (Previously presented): An apparatus as in claim 13, wherein the broker is an electronic broker operating at a node in an information exchange network.

Claim 18 (Previously presented): An apparatus as in claim 17, wherein the information exchange network is the Internet.

Claim 19 (Previously presented): An apparatus as in claim 13, further comprising means for the broker to make available to the bidders a buyer rating, wherein said rating includes information on the buyer's follow-through of bids in prior auctions.

Claim 20 (Currently amended): An apparatus for auctioning services requested by a buyer, comprising:

means for receiving from the buyer a service request for auctioning;

means for making available to potential bidders a buyer rating, wherein said rating includes information on the buyer's follow-through of bids in prior auctions, wherein the potential bidders consider the rating in deciding on whether to bid on the service request, wherein the higher the rating, the more willing the potential bidders would want to bid, and the lower the rating, the less willing the potential bidders would want to bid, wherein the potential bidders are sellers of services; and

means for receiving bids from the bidders.

Claim 21 (Previously presented): An apparatus as in claim 20, wherein the rating includes the number of service requests completed with respect to the number of service requests submitted in prior auctions.

Claim 22 (Previously presented): An apparatus as in claim 20, wherein the service request is for printing services.

Claim 23 (Previously presented): An apparatus as in claim 20, further comprising means to communicate with an information exchange network, wherein the buyer and the bidders communicates with the broker system via the information exchange network.

Claim 24 (Previously presented): An apparatus as in claim 23, wherein the information exchange network is the Internet.

Claim 25 (Currently amended): A network system for auctioning services, comprising:
one or more nodes for buyers to access the network;
one or more nodes for bidders to access the network, wherein the bidders are sellers of services; and
a broker system for auctioning services requested by a buyer, comprising:
means for the buyer to submit a service request to a broker for auctioning;
means for the buyer to specify at the start of the auction the number N of best bids to be considered from the auction, where N is a number less than number of all bids, and predetermined by the buyer based on tradeoff between price competition among bidders

(at a smaller N value) and number of bidders available for buyer selection of a bidder based on factors other than price (at a larger N value);

means for the broker to make N available to bidders; and

means for the buyer to select a bidder from one of the N best bids.

Claim 26 (Currently amended): A network system for auctioning services, comprising:
one or more nodes for buyers to access the network;

one or more nodes for bidders to access the network, wherein the bidders are seller of services; and

a broker system for auctioning services requested by a buyer, comprising:

means for receiving from the buyer a service request for auctioning;

means for making available to potential bidders a buyer rating, wherein said rating includes information on the buyer's follow-through of bids in prior auctions, wherein the potential bidders consider the rating in deciding on whether to bid on the service request, wherein the higher the rating, the more willing the potential bidders would want to bid, and the lower the rating, the less willing the potential bidders would want to bid; and

means for receiving bids from the bidders.